

Are We Sinking Duxbury Bay?

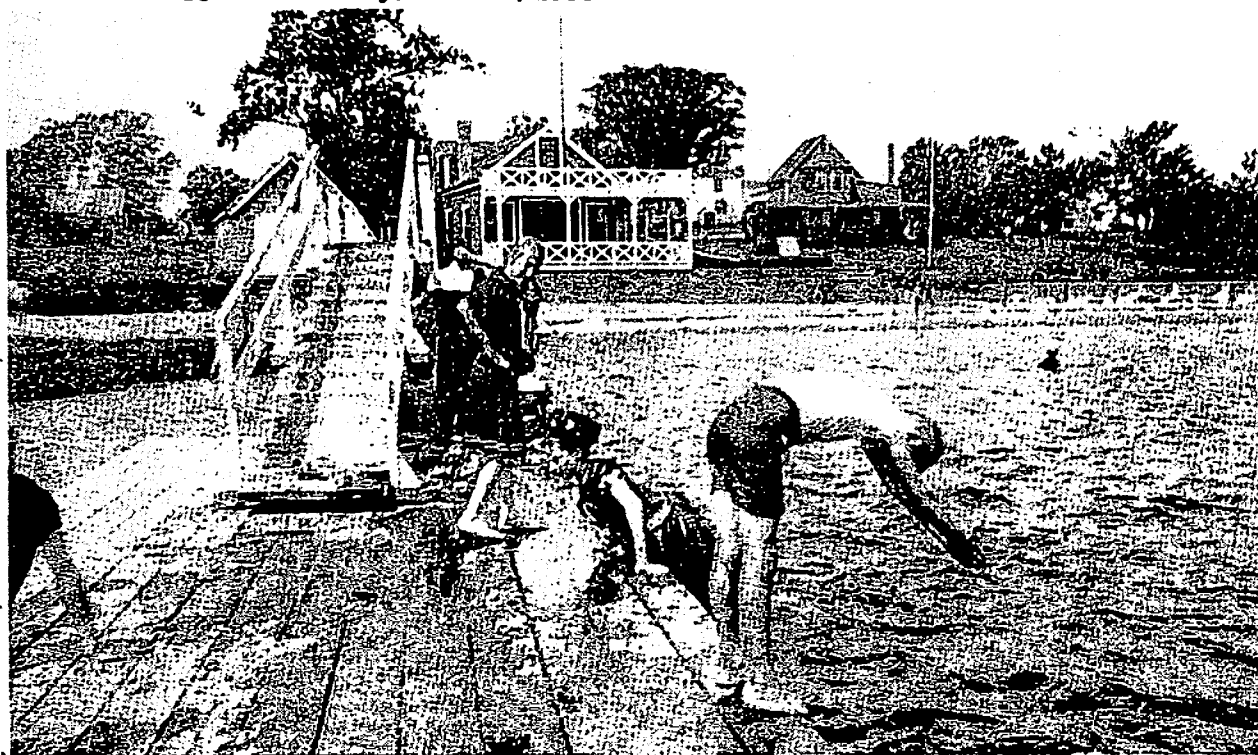
By HARRIET MERRY

The current controversy over the building of a pier next to Shipyard Lane and Ellison Beach is alarming. We have been living in Duxbury in retirement since 1977 and during the span of the past 20 years we have participated in a program to "Save The Beach" and another effort to "Save Bug Light." Now it appears we must undertake a campaign to "Save The Bay."

Dredging will be done next October to deepen the channel leading from the Town Pier and Yacht Club out to Bug Light. The tides of Duxbury Bay range in depth from 8 to 12 feet according to the season and they exit and enter approximately every 12 hours. We already have a Town Pier, a club pier, Bayside Marine as well as Long Point Marine, not to mention numerous private piers circling the west side of the bay from Gurnet Bridge to Howland's Landing and beyond. There are only 2 public beaches where it is safe for children to swim in Duxbury. One is at Landing Road on Kingston Bay and the other is on Shipyard Lane on Duxbury Bay. This last was given to the town by Eben Ellison specifically for the enjoyment of Duxbury residents -- especially children.

DUXBURY BAY

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, March 8, 1996



Swimming at the Charles Clapp lower house and pier around 190

At one time there were 22 Town Landings which offered public access to the waters of Duxbury Bay. These were primarily for the use of fishermen and lobstermen who earned their livelihood from the sea, but they were open to the public as well. Today there are about 8 such Town Landings and most of these are best known to those who continue to fish or lobster or launch their boats. The rest of these points of access have been swallowed up by residents who are fortunate enough to own property adjacent to the dead end lanes leading to the waterfront.

When we first bought our home in 1949 to use as a summer residence, Duxbury was a sleepy, rural town which burgeoned during the summer into a busy water playground. People came here from Boston, Washington and other cities to enjoy the recreational opportunities for sailing, swimming or just enjoying being out of the city during the warm summer months. Not too many people remember that the scientist, Rachel Carson, was visiting in Duxbury when the inspiration for her book, *Silent Spring*, came to her. She noticed a number of dead birds seemed to have been killed by pesticides.

Long before that, in 1871, a railroad to Plymouth was built and from then on it became possible for residents of the South Shore to commute by rail to Boston where they worked. For Duxbury this provided a reprieve from the loss of the ship building industry which flourished in Ezra Weston's day. King Caesar and other shipbuilders had made Duxbury one of the largest ship building ports on the East Coast. When you look at our bay today, it's hard to imagine that once upon a time great tall ships were built and sailed around the world from here. The ship

building era lasted from about 1800 to 1870. However, Duxbury Bay was too small to accommodate the large

Clipper ships so the industry moved north to Salem and Duxbury went into a decline until the coming of the railroad.

Before the arrival of the railroad the water of Duxbury Bay was paramount in the life of the community. There was a hotel on the east side of Standish Shore. Passenger boats from Boston brought vacationers to a pier at the foot of the hotel. There they could spend a week or two on the bay and swim from a beach along the shore. Today that pier is gone and the hotel has been divided into 2 private homes. As recently as the thirties my husband, Bob, remembers a steamboat running daily between Boston and Plymouth.

Plymouth is "America's Home Town". When the pilgrims arrived they chose the spot because of its sheltered harbor. The 3 bays, Plymouth, Kingston and Duxbury, all flowing out past Bug Light (which, of course, was not there in 1620), afforded ample opportunity to expand the small colony. They ventured out from Plymouth to settle the surrounding territory. Miles Standish sailed across the bay to live in sight of Plymouth harbor and Duxbury became America's first "suburb". Actually, the early settlers did not usually choose to settle too near the water. You will note that the oldest houses in Duxbury were built well away from the bay from whence came the Nor' Easters. The land was used for farming, the sea for nourishment.

The remarkable thing about Duxbury is that it has remained so much as it has always been. The train which came in 1871 was abandoned by 1959. Soon after that the Southeast expressway began to bring people to the South Shore in droves. This town, located at the end of the line of towns north of Plymouth, underwent a tremendous spurt in growth. What once was described as America's first "suburb" has now become what the posters facetiously call "DeLuxbury" today. New homes have been built all over town and what little waterfront property remains demands astronomical prices on the real estate market. We still try to preserve a small town atmosphere, but the modern usage of the bay comes close to choking its capacity to accommodate. Boats of all sizes and kinds, ski-doo's, windsurfers, lobster and fishing boats, sailboats, and, on the beach, over-sand vehicles, are all vying for space on a six-mile long bay which fills with water only twice in every 24 hours.

The Town fathers, currently called Selectmen or women, have done the best they could to cope with Duxbury's growth. We are fortunate to have many citizens who are willing to serve as volunteers on our town committees. We continue to govern our town by the original system of Town Meeting. Today we can afford to hire competent professionals to handle the operation of town departments. One of the ways Duxbury has dealt with the changes in society is to appoint study committees. Such committees or commissions appointed by the Selectmen or the Moderator attempt to determine the best way a situation should be handled. The result of the study is reported back to Town Meeting with recommendations for appropriate action.

In 1893 a committee was appointed by the Selectmen "to ascertain what town landings legally exist and to which the town has an undoubted right". The committee reported back to the town in 1899 and in 1900 after Town Meeting approval plans were filed at the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds. Other similar reports have been made periodically.

In 1975 there was a Town Landing Study Committee Report which stressed the importance of acquisition by the town of "all adjacent property at Harden Hill (oldest town landing) and at Howland's Landing if it becomes available, also improvements to Bay Farm". Harden Hill and Howland's Landing both permit public access to the water but the adjacent properties are still privately owned. The Bay Farm improvements have been implemented as well

as other suggestions made in that report.

In *The Clipper* of Feb. 24, 1996, it was interesting to see that the Conservation Commission has continued its hearings on the pier near Shipyard lane. In the adjacent column on the front page was a story about the preliminary findings of the Long Range Planning Survey done by the Town Planner. In that survey the citizens who responded to the questionnaire "rated water use and its purity as a very important characteristic of their community followed by importance of maintaining residential character, Duxbury Beach and Environmental Protection". Clearly the residents of Duxbury care a great deal about the welfare of this town.

What Duxbury does not need is a proliferation of piers protruding into the bay from the large homes now being built on the waterfront. Planners should now examine just how many more structures and how much more traffic Duxbury Bay can sustain without being inundated. In an age of environmental awareness such as ours, we should be able to find a way to conserve our bay.